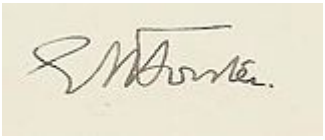
E. M. Forster

E. M. Forster, by Dora Carrington c. 1924–1925

Born	Edward Morgan Forster 1 January 1879 Marylebone, Middlesex, England
Died	7 June 1970 (aged 91) Coventry, Warwickshire, England
Occupation	Writer (novels, short stories, essays)
Nationality	English
Alma mater	Tonbridge School King's College, Cambridge
Period	1901–70
Genre	Realism, symbolism, modernism
Subject	Class division, gender, homosexuality

Signature



Edward Morgan Forster OM CH (1 January 1879 – 7 June 1970) was an English novelist, short story writer, essayist and librettist. He is known best for his ironic and well-plotted novels examining class difference and hypocrisy in early 20th-century British society. Forster's humanistic impulse toward understanding and sympathy may be aptly summed up in the epigraph to his 1910 novel *Howards End*: "Only connect ... ". His 1908 novel, *A Room with a View*, is his most optimistic work, while *A Passage to India* (1924) brought him his greatest success. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 13 different years.[1]

Early years

A section of the main school building. Tonbridge School

Forster was born into an Anglo-Irish and Welsh middle-class family at 6 Melcombe Place, Dorset Square, London NW1, in a building that no longer exists. He was the only child of Alice Clara "Lily" (née Whichelo) and Edward Morgan Llewellyn Forster, an architect. His name was officially registered as Henry Morgan Forster, but at his baptism he was accidentally named Edward Morgan Forster.[2] To distinguish him from his father, he was always called Morgan. His father died of tuberculosis on 30 October 1880, before Morgan's second birthday.[3] Among Forster's ancestors were members of the Clapham Sect, a social reform group within the Church of England.

He inherited £8,000 (£794,520 as of 2016)[4] from his paternal great-aunt Marianne Thornton (daughter of the abolitionist Henry Thornton), who died on 5 November 1887.[5] The money was enough to live on and enabled him to become a writer. He attended Tonbridge School in Kent, as a day boy. The theatre at the school has been named in his honour.[6]

At King's College, Cambridge, between 1897 and 1901,[7] he became a member of a discussion society known as the Apostles (formally named the Cambridge *Conversazione* Society). Many of its members went on to constitute what came to be known as the Bloomsbury Group, of which Forster was a peripheral member in the 1910s and 1920s. There is a famous recreation of Forster's Cambridge at the beginning of *The Longest Journey*. The Schlegel sisters of *Howards End* are based to some degree on Vanessa and Virginia Stephens.[8]

After leaving university, he travelled in continental Europe with his mother. In 1914, he visited Egypt, Germany and India with the classicist Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, by which time he had written all but one of his novels.[9] In the First World War, as a conscientious objector, Forster volunteered for the International Red Cross, and served in Alexandria, Egypt.

Forster spent a second spell in India in the early 1920s as the private secretary to Tukojirao III, the Maharajah of Dewas. *The Hill of Devi* is his non-fictional account of this period. After returning to London from India, he completed his last novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), for which he won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction. He also edited Eliza Fay's (1756–1816) letters from India, in an edition first published in 1925.[10]

After *A Passage to India*

Arlington Park Mansions, Chiswick

In the 1930s and 1940s Forster became a successful broadcaster on BBC Radio and a public figure associated with the Union of Ethical Societies. His weekly book review during the war was commissioned by George Orwell, who was the talks producer at the Indian Section of the BBC from 1941 to 1943.[11] He was awarded a Benson Medal in 1937.

Forster was homosexual (open to his close friends, but not to the public) and a lifelong bachelor.[12] He developed a long-term, loving relationship with Bob Buckingham, a married policeman.[13] Forster included Buckingham and his wife May in his circle, which included J. R. Ackerley, a writer and literary editor of *The Listener,* the psychologist W. J. H. Sprott and, for a time, the composer Benjamin Britten. Other writers with whom Forster associated included Christopher Isherwood, the poet Siegfried Sassoon, and the Belfast-based novelist Forrest Reid.

From 1925 until his mother's death at age 90 on 11 March 1945, Forster lived with her at West Hackhurst, Abinger Hammer, finally leaving on or around 23 September 1946.[14] His London base was 26 Brunswick Square from 1930 to 1939, after which he rented 9 Arlington Park Mansions in Chiswick until at least 1961.[15][16]

Forster was elected an honorary fellow of King's College, Cambridge, in January 1946,[15] and lived for the most part in the college, doing relatively little. He declined a knighthood in 1949 and was made a Companion of Honour in 1953.[15] In 1969 he was made a member of the Order of Merit. Forster died of a stroke[17] on 7 June 1970 at the age of 91, at the Buckinghams' home in Coventry.[15]

Novels

The monument to Forster in Stevenage, Hertfordshire, near Rooks Nest where Forster grew up. He based the setting for his novel *Howards End* on this area, now informally known as Forster Country.

Forster had five novels published in his lifetime. Although *Maurice* was published shortly after his death, it had been written nearly sixty years earlier. He never finished a seventh novel, *Arctic Summer*.

His first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), is the story of Lilia, a young English widow who falls in love with an Italian man, and of the efforts of her bourgeois relatives to get her back from Monteriano (based on San Gimignano). Philip Herriton's mission to retrieve her from Italy has features in common with that of Lambert Strether in Henry James's *The Ambassadors*. Forster discussed that work ironically and somewhat disapprovingly in his book *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). *Where Angels Fear to Tread* was adapted as a 1991 film directed by Charles Sturridge.

Next, Forster published *The Longest Journey* (1907), an inverted bildungsroman following the lame Rickie Elliott from Cambridge to a career as a struggling writer and then to a post as a schoolmaster, married to the unappealing Agnes Pembroke. In a series of scenes on the hills of Wiltshire, which introduce Rickie's wild half-brother Stephen Wonham, Forster attempts a kind of sublime related to those of Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence.

Forster's third novel, *A Room with a View* (1908), is his lightest and most optimistic. It was started as early as 1901, before any of his others; its earliest versions are entitled "Lucy". The book explores the young Lucy Honeychurch's trip to Italy with her cousin, and the choice she must make between the free-thinking George Emerson and the repressed aesthete Cecil Vyse. George's father Mr Emerson quotes thinkers who influenced Forster, including Samuel Butler. *A Room with a View* was adapted as a film in 1985 by the Merchant-Ivory team.

Where Angels Fear to Tread and *A Room with a View* can be seen collectively as Forster's Italian novels. Both include references to the famous Baedeker guidebooks and concern narrow-minded middle-class English tourists abroad. The books share many themes with his short stories collected in *The Celestial Omnibus* and *The Eternal Moment*.

Howards End (1910) is an ambitious "condition-of-England" novel concerned with different groups within the Edwardian middle classes, represented by the Schlegels (bohemian intellectuals), the Wilcoxes (thoughtless plutocrats) and the Basts (struggling lower-middle-class aspirants). Critics have observed that numerous characters in Forster's novels die suddenly. This is true of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *Howards End* and, most particularly, *The Longest Journey*.

Forster achieved his greatest success with *A Passage to India* (1924). The novel takes as its subject the relationship between East and West, seen through the lens of India in the later days of the British Raj. Forster connects personal relationships with the politics of colonialism through the story of the Englishwoman Adela Quested, the Indian Dr. Aziz, and the question of what did or did not happen between them in the Marabar Caves. Forster makes special mention of the author Ahmed Ali and his *Twilight in Delhi* in his Preface to its Everyman's Library Edition.

Maurice (1971) was published posthumously. It is a homosexual love story which also returns to matters familiar from Forster's first three novels, such as the suburbs of London in the English home counties, the experience of attending Cambridge, and the wild landscape of Wiltshire. The novel was controversial, given that Forster's homosexuality had not been previously known or widely acknowledged. Today's critics continue to argue over the extent to which Forster's sexuality and personal activities[18] influenced his writing. Maurice was adapted as a film in 1987 by the Merchant-Ivory team.

Early in his writing career, Forster attempted a historical novel about the Byzantine scholar Gemistus Pletho and the Italian condottiero Sigismondo de Malatesta, but was not satisfied with the result and never published it - though he kept the manuscript and later showed it to Naomi Mitchison.[19]

Critical reception

This section requires expansion. *(August 2012)*

In the United States, interest in, and appreciation for, Forster was spurred by Lionel Trilling's *E. M. Forster: A Study*, which began:

E. M. Forster is for me the only living novelist who can be read again and again and who, after each reading, gives me what few writers can give us after our first days of novel-reading, the sensation of having learned something (Trilling 1943).

Forsterian studies are promoted by the International E. M. Forster Society established in 2010.

Key themes

Forster was President of the Cambridge Humanists from 1959 until his death and a member of the Advisory Council of the British Humanist Association from 1963 until his death. His views as a humanist are at the heart of his work, which often depicts the pursuit of personal connections in spite of the restrictions of contemporary society. His humanist attitude is expressed in the non-fictional essay *What I Believe*. When Forster's cousin, Philip Whichelo, donated a portrait of Forster to the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GLHA), Jim Herrick, the founder, quoted Forster's words: "The humanist has four leading characteristics – curiosity, a free mind, belief in good taste, and belief in the human race."

Forster's two best-known works, *A Passage to India* and *Howards End*, explore the irreconcilability of class differences. *A Room with a View* also shows how questions of propriety and class can make human connection difficult. The novel is his most widely read and accessible work, remaining popular long after its original publication. His posthumous novel *Maurice* explores the possibility of class reconciliation as one facet of a homosexual relationship.

Sexuality is another key theme in Forster's works. Some critics have argued that a general shift from heterosexual to homosexual love can be observed through the course of his writing career. The foreword to *Maurice* describes his struggle with his homosexuality, while he explored similar issues in several volumes of

short stories. Forster's explicitly homosexual writings, the novel *Maurice* and the short story collection *The Life to Come,* were published shortly after his death.

Forster is noted for his use of symbolism as a technique in his novels, and he has been criticised (as by his friend Roger Fry) for his attachment to mysticism. One example of his symbolism is the wych elm tree in *Howards End.* The characters of Mrs. Wilcox in that novel and Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India* have a mystical link with the past, and a striking ability to connect with people from beyond their own circles.